

From Farms to Prisons



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Do prisons make communities secure? Consider the cost of imprisonment, not only of the actual funds spent on the upkeep of each prisoner (which are significantly higher than what may be spent on a person sentenced outside of custody), but also take a look at the indirect costs, such as the social, economic and healthcare related costs. Indirect costs are difficult to measure, but apply specifically in terms of long-term social program management. The results of a failure by communities to support favorable work conditions, access to health care, and safe housing are increased prison populations.

Gapminder graphs data to visually demonstrate relationships over time. Look at New Mexico, Washington, and California through prisoner data, in relation to average area of farm land in acreage given to each person in that given year. West coast Americans experienced a loss of farms, and rise in prison populations as shown by this link. Our data from Western American states directly applies to the report on Transitional Justice from the United Nations. According to the United Nation's Transitional Justice report from 2014: "The obligation to respect is not subject to progressive realization but is of immediate effect. Regarding economic, social and cultural rights, it prohibits forced evictions, the destruction of houses and other property, forced sterilization, forced labor, intentional famine, gross and systematic discrimination in relation to the right to food, education, health, housing, social security, enjoyment of just and favorable conditions of work, and participation in cultural life." (Excerpt from Transitional Justice and Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 2014).

A prison sentence only denies the basic right to liberty. It does not restrict other human rights. Except those restricted by the fact of being in prison all housing rights remain valid. Prison reform will ensure that other rights command respect. Compliance toward international standards and norms demands the United States re-address housing and criminal justice to meet environmental, social and governance issues.

What is being done to repair the American justice system with shared equality? The importance of immediate respect is only the first duty. Communities and individuals are in dire need of an experience that builds equity from within. The loss of farming cultures in the United States removed security from the individual farmer, and placed security unto the larger community. These lifestyle problems create governance issues that relate to housing, because prisons are supported by communities; despite their evidence of ineffectively housing citizens.

Housing is basic human right. Here, are key examples of what defines adequate housing.

- **Legal security of tenure:** All persons should possess a degree of security of tenure which guarantees legal protection against forced eviction, harassment and other threats; in respect to prisons this tenure problem is enhanced by recidivism.
- **Affordability:** Costs associated with housing should not threaten or compromise the attainment and satisfaction of other basic needs (for example, food, education, access to health care); again as prisoners, the effect of this basic human right is not diminished.
- **Habitability:** Adequate housing should provide adequate space, protection from cold, damp, heat, rain, wind or other threats to health, structural hazards, and diseases; prisoners (particularly felons) are not able to secure housing on release.
- **Availability of services, materials, facilities and infrastructure:** Housing is adequate if its occupants have safe drinking water, adequate sanitation, energy for cooking, heating and

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lighting, sanitation and washing facilities, means of food storage, and refuse disposal;

- **Accessibility:** Housing is adequate if the specific needs of disadvantaged and marginalized groups are not taken into account (such as the poor, people facing discrimination; persons with disabilities, victims of natural disasters); with this the United Nations espoused the perspective that prisoners wrongfully imprisoned are people facing discrimination.
- **Location:** Adequate housing allows for access to employment, health-care, education, and should not be on polluted sites, or in proximity to [pollution](#) sources; sectioning off large portions of minority groups, with no consideration for environmental impact, created ghettos with increased criminal activity.
- **Cultural adequacy:** Adequate housing takes into account the expression of cultural identity and ways of life.

(Source: Tool kit for Right to [Adequate Housing](#))

Adequate housing has fallen dramatically in combination of loss of farm land and increased prison populations. Basic human rights and housing must regain security through individual freedom. Global partnerships are a solution to corporate human rights abuses. More articles about the effects of discrimination on human rights are here:

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Amie Comeau teaches Stress Reduction for adults. Her background includes portrait photographer, database administrator, research specialist, and garden scientist. Currently, she supports K-12 educators focus... [View profile](#)

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